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RUEHFT/GOLFCO MSGBN AMCONGEN FRANKFURT GE IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000195

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2017

TAGS: PGOV ASEC CASC ELAB PINS AEMR GV

SUBJECT: TFGV01: SITREP 45: GUINEA UNREST, FEB. 19, 2007,
1245 GMT

REF: CONAKRY 187 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: PolOff Jessica Davis Ba, Reason 1.4 (b,d)

Situation on the Ground

¶1. (SBU) Non-curfew hours have been extended to 0600-1800 for all residents in Guinea, effective February 19; this doubles the time people may circulate freely on foot or by vehicle. General Kerfalla Camara, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, included the relaxation in his daily broadcast evening of February 18. He did not lift the state of siege, nor have the unions suspended the general strike. After a slow start to the day, there is significantly more vehicular traffic, including taxis, than there has been since February 19. Some small shops and market stalls are open. The environment is similar in the interior.

¶2. (SBU) The military continues to decrease its visible presence. Few military are deployed in the streets, and there is little gunfire during their patrols through Conakry's neighborhoods. In his February 18 radio address, General Kerfalla thanked the entire population for following the orders of the state of siege and asked them to continue vigilance and good behavior. He stated, "I remain optimistic that we can achieve peace and development through the participation of all Guineans." Kerfalla emphasized that the state of siege is a temporary measure, necessary to return to peace.

¶3. (SBU) Police and gendarmes are taking the lead on patrols and at checkpoints. Checkpoints remain, but fewer than last week; most operated only during curfew hours. Red berets remain at the checkpoint at Castro bridge, the chokepoint to downtown, which is continuous in curfew and non-curfew hours.

¶4. (SBU) On the February 18 national news, Minister of Justice Gomez discussed the ongoing investigation into "Guineans who have killed other Guineans." Gomez explained that international investigations take place only when a government refuses to undertake an inquiry, which was not the case in Guinea. He said that Guinea has sufficient human resources and expertise to mount the investigation, but would not hesitate to call on international assistance for technical questions they could not answer. Gomez concluded,

"This problem is Guinean -- it happened in Guinea, by Guineans, and it will be managed by Guineans."

¶ 15. (C) The government continues its operations to identify and arrest "foreign actors;" security forces are targeting persons believed to be connected with LURD, ULIMO, or other militias. Our sources confirm the arrest of at least 100 persons who are being detained at various military facilities in Guinea. Over the weekend, military arrested Lieutenant Manou Cisse, active military officer and counselor at the presidency, for her connection with former LURD leader Aisha Conneh, the reported lead organizer of the militia force. Contrary to earlier reports, our sources tell us that Conneh did not intend to use the militias to support Conte. Instead, Conneh, in connection with former Minister of Presidential Affairs Fode Bangoura and others, is suspected of organizing efforts to seize power.

U.S. Press Statement

¶ 16. (SBU) The press statement released by the Embassy February 16 has received widespread coverage in the international media and on the internet. National outlet RTG did not publish it. Reports from contacts suggest that many Guineans heard the statement on shortwave broadcasts from RFI or BBC. The statement was disseminated quickly on the web, as editors on our initial address list responded that they were passing to others who would be interested.

¶ 17. (SBU) Reaction has been positive. A Guinean professor in the U.S. said the statement was "encouraging and conforms to the traditions which represent the ideal and honor of the United States." Other international representatives were highly appreciative of its forthrightness. An Embassy FSN currently in Labe, about 8 hours from Conakry, said that

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Guineans there were very happy with the statement, which they heard on shortwave. There was confusion in some quarters as to whether this is an official U.S. Government position or simply an Embassy statement.

Political Update

¶ 18. (C) Following the Ambassador's appeal on February 16 for implementation of Article 34 to remove President Conte, National Assembly President Sompore, Supreme Court President Sidime, and Economic and Social Council President Kamano consulted with religious leaders. Then, on February 17, they all (the three institutional presidents and the religious leaders) called on President Conte and reportedly told him that the American ambassador was advising that he should step down "before its too late." Conte reportedly reacted negatively, criticizing them for not coming to see him as fellow Guineans but rather at the behest of a foreigner. General Kerfalla was also present.

¶ 19. (SBU) A planned meeting February 17 including union leaders, religious leaders, and presidents of the national assembly, supreme court, and economic and social council did not take place. Although they have not made a formal statement, union leaders told us that since the military did not honor Rabiatou Serah Diallo's February 15 request to lift the state of siege, they would not begin negotiations. The union leadership has not met since February 9 and has thus not been able to prepare a common position to advocate in negotiations. Taibou Diallo, USTG executive committee member, told Poloff that it is imperative for them to meet if they are to move forward. Thus far, they have not received approval for any meetings under the state of siege, even with the relaxed curfew hours.

¶ 10. (SBU) On February 18, union leaders met with religious

leaders. We understand the union demarche was for the Muslim and Christian clerics to ask Conte to lift the state of siege. The religious leaders reportedly asked the unions whether they would be able to guarantee continued calm if this were to happen. Unable to make this guarantee, the unions asked for an eased curfew. That evening, General Kerfalla announced the new curfew hours.

¶11. (SBU) The unions told us they are willing to go back to the table if there is a firm basis for discussion. They have been asked by the presidents of the national assembly, supreme court, and economic and social council to propose names for new prime minister. However, the unions are seeking assurances that Conte has personally issued this directive. The unions maintain that they have already engaged in dialogue, resulting in the January 27 agreement. Unions leaders urge the government to follow the signed roadmap. Until the government lives up to its side of the bargain, the unions plan to continue the general strike.

Mission Operations

¶12. (SBU) On February 18, Mission staff went to modified standfast for non-curfew hours to allow employees to shop and visit friends. They are required to have their radios and cell phones in possession at all times. There have been no direct threats to AmCits of staff during the recent unrest.

¶13. (SBU) Consular staff are seeing steady traffic at the ACS window; about 7 people came in on special Saturday hours, and another dozen so far today. Most are dual nationality minors, whose guardians are looking for assistance to travel to the U.S. Conoffs received about 24 calls from Friday evening to this morning. The airport remains open, with several flights scheduled. Amcits desirous of leaving on commercial air have been able to do so.

MCDONALD